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Message Text

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TAGS: SOPN, HA, US

SUBJECT: WASHINGTON POST ARTICLE ON HAITI

1. BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED:

FOLLOWING IS TEXT OF UPI ARTICLE BY PIETER VAN BENNEKOM CARRIED IN WASHINGTON POST NOVEMBER 21 AND HEADLINED, "U.S. RELAXES PRESSURES ON RIGHTS ISSUE IN HAITI":

QUOTE:

AMERICAN DIPLOMATS ARE APPARENTLY SAFISFIED WITH THE HUMAN RIGHTS PROGRESS MADE IN HAITI OVER THE PAST SEVERAL MONTHS AND HAVE STOPPED PRESSURING PRESIDENT-FOR-LIFE JEAN-CLAUDE DUVALIER TO MAKE EVEN GREATER CONCESSIONS.

THEY FEEL SUCH PRESSURE MIGHT BE COUNTERPRODUCTIVE AT THIS MOMENT AND HOPE THAT DUVALIER WILL, OF HIS OWN ACCORD, MAKE FURTHER IMPROVEMENTS IN THE LOT OF HIS MOSTLY IMPOV-
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ERISHED AND ILLITERATE 5 MILLION CITIZENS.

BUT THE REAL QUESTION IS WHETHER THE HAITIANS THEMSELVES WILL BE CONTENT WITH JUST A LITTLE FREEDOM AND JUST A

FEW HUMAN RIGHTS.

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JEAN-CLAUDE, NOW 26, TOOK OVER FROM HIS FATHER, FRANCOIS "PAPA DOC" DUVALIER, IN 1972 AND HAS LIBERALIZED HAITI QUITE A BIT -- WITH SOME NUDGING FROM THE UNITED STATES, ESPECIALLY SINCE THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION STARTED ITS HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN.

GONE, AT LEAST FROM THE GOVERNMENT PAYROLL, ARE THE TON-TON MACOUTES, PAP DOC'S PRIVATE ARMY, AND MOST OF THE OTHER TRAPPINGS OF TERROR OF HIS REGIME. GONE ALSO ARE ALL OF HAITI'S POLITICAL PRISONERS, AT LEAST THE 104 SURVIVING ONES, RELEASED ON THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE DUVALIER DYNASTY LAST SEPTEMBER.

THE PUBLICATION OF SOME ANTI-GOVERNMENT POLITICAL COMMENT IN THE WEEKLY JEUNE PRESSE AND ELSEWHERE IS BEING TOLERATED THESE DAYS, EVEN THOUGH THE INTER-AMERICAN PRESS ASSOCIATION STILL LISTS HAITI AMONG COUNTRIES THAT DO NOT HAVE FREEDOM OF THE PRESS.

STRIKES AND UNIONS ARE STILL ILLEGAL BUT SOME LABOR ACTIVITY IS GETTING RESULTS INSTEAD OF BRUTAL REPRESSION THESE DAYS. FACED WITH LABOR PROTESTS SPILLING OVER INTO STREET DEMONSTRATIONS AND EVEN THE OCCASIONAL OCCUPATION OF A RADIO STATION TO AIR COMPLAINTS AGAINST EMPLOYERS, THE LABOR MINISTRY TOOK THE UNUSUAL STEP OF ANNOUNCING THAT IT IS OPEN TO RECEIVE COMPLAINTS FROM WORKERS AGAINST EM-
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PLOYERS ABOUT ABUSIVE OR ILLEGAL BEHAVIOR.

IT EVEN GOT TOUGH WITH SOME FACTORIES FLOUTING HAITI'S LABOR LAWS BY PAYING THEIR EMPLOYEES LESS THAN THE DOLS 1.20 DAY MINIMUM WAGE, CALLING THEM "APPRENTICES" AND FIRING THEIR ENTIRE LABOR FORCE EVERY TWO MONTHS TO HIRE NEW "APPRENTICES."

ON THE POLITICAL FRONT, THE GOVERNMENT IS CONSIDERING A PLAN TO HAVE MAYORS ELECTED NEXT YEAR. IT IS STILL AN OPEN QUESTION WHETHER FREE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS WILL BE ALLOWED OR WHETHER VOTERS WILL BE ASKED TO APPROVE BY ACCLAMATION THE CANDIDATE CHOSEN BY THE RULING DUVALIERIST PARTY.

DESPITE THE LIBERALIZATIONS, HAITI, THE POOREST NATION IN THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE -- WITH AN ILLITERACY RATE OF OVER 90 PERCENT AND A PER CAPITA ANNUAL INCOME OF DOLS 120 -- REMAINS AN AUTHORITARIAN SOCIETY.

AT THE HEART OF THAT SOCIETY IS THE INSTITUTION OF THE PRESIDENCY FOR LIFE THAT STIFLES ANY POSSIBILITY OF THE

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PEOPLE DECIDING WHAT KIND OF GOVERNMENT THEY WANT.

THE UNITED STATES, WHICH HAS BEEN HELPING TO FEED HUNGRY PEASANTS IN HAITI FOR YEARS WITH HUMANITARIAN AID, IS NOT PUSHING DUVALIER TO ABANDON HIS TITLE.

"IF WE PUSH HIM TOO FAR, HE MIGHT GET MAD AND FALL BACK INTO REPRESSION", ONE AMERICAN OFFICIAL SAID RECENTLY. "WE HAVE TO HOPE THAT OF HIS OWN ACCORD, HE WILL MAKE FURTHER LIBERALIZATIONS IN HUMAN RIGHTS. BUT WE CAN'T TOUCH THE INSTITUTION OF THE PRESIDENCY FOR LIFE.

"THE TRICK IS TO BYPASS THAT INSTITUTION AND GET OTHER REFORMS MADE SO IT DOESN'T MATTER ANY MORE, SO THE GOVERN-
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MENT WILL HAVE TO BE RESPONSIVE TO THE NEEDS OF THE PEOPLE, WHETHER IT IS HEADED BY A PRESIDENT-FOR-LIFE OR NOT," THE DIPLOMAT SAID.
UNQUOTE END UNCLASSIFIED.

2. BEGIN L.O.U. FYI - FOLLOWING IS GUIDANCE PREPARED FOR DEPARTMENT'S PRESS BRIEFING. (NO QUESTION WAS ASKED AT BRIEFING NOVEMBER 21).

QUESTION:

CAN YOU CONFIRM THAT THE UNITED STATES IS SATISFIED WITH HAITIAN PROGRESS IN HUMAN RIGHTS TO THE POINT WHERE IT NO LONGER NEEDS TO BE RAISED AS AN ISSUE BY U.S. DIPLOMATS?

ANSWER:

THERE HAVE BEEN ENCOURAGING DEVELOPMENTS IN HAITI RECENTLY. IN SEPTEMBER THE GOVERNMENT OF HAITI FREED 105 PRISONERS, DECLARING THEM TO BE THE LAST REMAINING POLITICAL PRISONERS IN THE COUNTRY. FURTHER, THE GOVERNMENT HAS OFFERED TO TRY TO ACCOUNT FOR PRISONERS WHO MAY HAVE DIED WHILE IN PRISON. THE GOVERNMENT OF HAITI ALSO HAS BECOME THE FIFTH COUNTRY TO ADHERE TO THE INTER-AMERICAN CONVENTION ON HUMAN RIGHTS. IT HAS ESTABLISHED A NEW COURT WITH THE STATED PURPOSE OF ENSURING PROPER TRIAL FOR SECURITY OFFENDERS. WE CONSIDER THESE POSITIVE INITIATIVES AND ARE HAPPY TO RECOGNIZE THEM AS SUCH. HOWEVER, FURTHER IMPROVE-MENT IN THE OVERALL HUMAN RIGHTS CONDITIONS IN HAITI ARE STILL NEEDED AND WE CONTINUE TO DISCUSS WITH THE GOVERNMENT OF HAITI AS WE DO WITH OTHER GOVERNMENTS OUR VIEWS AND CONCERNS IN THIS AREA. HABIB

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